Financing Law School

How do most students pay for law school?

It’s each law student’s responsibility to understand and arrange for the financing of law school. Tuition costs vary widely with the high end being well over $50,000 a year. You’re looking at a sizable financial investment over the course of three years once you add in housing, food, books, transportation, and personal expenses. While scholarships, grants, and work-study are available, about 80% of students rely on education loans to finance tuition and living expenses while in law school. Both federal and private loans are based on the law schools “estimate of need.” Traditionally, federal loans provide the lowest interest rates for applicants. For a more detailed account please visit Financial Aid: An Overview at LSAC.org.

Are there teaching assistant jobs available?

In law school, there are a limited number of coveted research fellowships and a handful of writing course assistantships available to defray costs of attendance. Fellowships and assistantships are both awarded on a competitive basis with the difference being that the former provide money which does not have to be paid back while the latter pay a stipend in exchange for a relatively small work load on campus.

Do you have to fill out a FAFSA to get financial aid for law school?

Yes. Each year students must fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. A completed FAFSA is necessary to be eligible for federal Stafford (subsidized and unsubsidized) and Perkins (on a limited basis) loans. Federal Stafford loans are generally the best financing option due to their lower interest rate. Eligible students can receive up to $8,500 a year in subsidized Stafford loans (meaning the federal government pays the interest which accrues while you’re in law school) and no more than $20,500 a year in subsidized and unsubsidized Stafford loans combined (unsubsidized Stafford loans are ones where the student is responsible for the interest which builds up during law school).

What do you do if you need to borrow more than $20,500 a year?

After you have borrowed the maximum in Stafford loans, the next best option is going with federal Direct PLUS loans. Their current interest rate is 7% plus loan fees. More details can be found at this Federal Student Aid page.
How do I figure out what lender to go with?

This is where a little hard work can pay healthy dividends. There are numerous different for-profit and non-profit lenders to ask about interest rate discounts and principal reduction incentives. For competing deals on loan terms among for-profit lenders, visit SimpleTuition. See the Education Finance Council for a list of non-profit lenders. And no matter which lender you choose, I highly recommend that you minimize your living expenses so as to have to borrow as little as possible. Packing lunches, limiting impulse buys, and shopping around for better interest rates can make a big difference upon graduation.

What’s an LRAP?

Loan Repayment Assistance Programs are available at more than 100 different law schools for those graduates who take low paying public interest or government jobs. A good place to begin your search for these programs is at Equal Justice Works where you can find a list of all the different law schools’ LRAPs.

Is funding for veterans readily available?

Educational assistance for veterans, including but not limited to the Montgomery GI Bill and the Post-9/11 GI Bill, is available. Visit the United States Department of Veterans Affairs Education and Training page for more information. The Post-9/11 GI Bill is particularly beneficial to veterans who may have already completed their Montgomery GI Bill benefits. Benefits include up to an additional 12 months of tuition assistance including money for books and a housing allowance. For questions about certification and enrollment, please visit Purdue Fort Wayne’s Military Student Services website.